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ABSTRACT

This study examines how 11 community colleges present and promote their service learning courses via the Internet. Of particular interest to this study are the following features of online presentations: (1) how detailed and developed the Web site is and the extent of the information provided; (2) whether the Web site provides student and faculty responses to service learning participation; (3) what the Web site emphasizes (e.g. student leadership, volunteerism, community service); (4) inclusion of community partnerships; (5) contracts or learning agreements; (6) program evaluation; and (7) coursework and other sample information. Phone interviews were conducted to collect more detailed information on the programs. Findings indicate that student participation, a factor proven to have a positive impact on retention, and courses with service learning components are increasing on a term-to-term basis, and that faculty participation has been limited to approximately 1 out of every 14 instructors. Benefits to student participants include improved self-awareness and satisfaction, as well as more tangible rewards, such as scholarships. The majority of service learning courses exist within the humanities and social sciences. All of the programs studied were less than ten years old, and not all were well established. Faculty resistance and an unwillingness to change curricula were reported to be the greatest obstacles to program success. Contains 16 references. (AS)

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Service Learning Content on the Internet: How are Community Colleges Advertising?

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SERVICE LEARNING CONTENT ON THE INTERNET: HOW ARE COMMUNITY COLLEGES ADVERTISING?

Overview

A 1996 study by the American Association of Community Colleges (1997) indicates that 71% of community colleges include the concept of service in their mission statements. Lynn Barnett (1996), Directory of Community Development for the AACC, points out that "(Community colleges') mission statements call for them to be community-based organizations, to meet community needs, and to provide service to the community"(p. 17). By definition, community colleges are committed to providing service and creating service opportunities for their students and community. Service learning stems from a number of community-service based initiatives. President Clinton's 1993 National and Community Service Act provided the initial funding and support for a large proportion of service learning programs currently on community college campuses (Serow, et. al., 1996, p.4). Of the more than 1100 community colleges in the United States, 719 responded to a 1995 survey AACC survey on service learning. Two-hundred eighteen community colleges in 41 states reported offering service learning components in a variety of courses (AACC, 1996, p.1). Of those colleges not offering service learning opportunities, 65% indicated a definite interest in implementing such programs (AACC, 1996, p.1). This information may appear dated, however it is comprehensive in data and points to the

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fact that colleges and students are moving in a direction of student and community development. Implementing service learning coursework into curricula provides students and faculty with a long-term approach to education. That is to say, service learning prepares students and faculty to evaluate their roles in education and commit to a lifetime of service. Participation in service learning coursework places students and faculty in contact with all possible age groups and various types of service.

As community colleges maintain their commitments to service and more campuses begin to shift from community service to service learning, it is important for administrators, students, and the impacted communities to understand the differences between traditional community service and the emerging concept of service learning.

> ***Community Service***—is defined as "unpaid work that everyone can do to improve the quality of life of those being served, of those serving, and ultimately of the community as a whole" (Century Technical and Community College Service Learning Faculty Manual, 1996, p.5).
>
> ***Service Learning***—is "a method of teaching which combines community service with academic instruction as it focuses on critical, reflective thinking, and civic responsibilities...(service learning) programs involve students in organized community service that addresses local needs while developing their academic skills, sense of civic responsibility and commitment to the community"(AACC Survey Report,1996).

Purpose of the study

As community colleges and senior institutions implement and increase service learning programs, a growing amount of information is available regarding the effects of such programs. Many campuses are moving from the initial "set-up" phases into assessing curricula, student and faculty involvement, and the benefits to the community. Measuring student and faculty participation, the extent of community involvement, and program effectiveness and delivery are all important items to consider when researching campus programs. Because service learning is relatively new to many campuses, very few longitudinal studies are available or provide relevant information. My chief reason for research in service learning is to explore the possible connections between participation in service learning courses and student retention. Based on Astin's (1984) theory of involvement, the extent to which a college student involves himself or herself on campus determines the persistence of the student. In other words, retention is contingent on students eliciting sufficient effort (p. 302). Service learning provides students with the opportunity to become active on their campuses and within their communities. Unfortunately there are too many variables that cannot be easily controlled and assessing retention is too difficult with the current information available. The purpose of this particular study is to provide foundational information on community college service learning programs across the United States by evaluating service learning content on the Internet. Ideally, web-based research provides a quick overview, easy accessibility, and greater dissemination of information. This study will examine the content of a range of community colleges.

Methodology

As mentioned before, over 218 community colleges currently offer service learning coursework (AACC Survey Report, 1996). Unfortunately, not all community colleges choose to, or have the resources, to provide information about their programs on the Internet. I chose to look at eleven community colleges currently promoting service learning via the Internet. I chose these colleges for a number of reasons. In an effort to provide a broad scope of service learning programs, the eleven community colleges used were chosen based on location, student population, and life of program. Location of the community college will largely determine the types of services available and the population of students participating in service learning. For example, service learning courses offered at an urban campus would probably differ from the courses at a rural community college. Location may also determine the availability of resources. Similarly, general populations may determine the extent of resources. Smaller community colleges may draw from smaller communities with a limited pool of community service options. Student populations may also have an effect on service learning. It is highly likely that the student populations reflect the overall population of their communities. Here are some of the features of on-line presentations I am interested in:

- ⇨ How detailed is the web-site? How developed is the web-site? What is the extent of the information provided?
- ⇨ Does the web-site provide student and faculty responses to service learning participation?
- ⇨ What is emphasized on the web-sites: Student leadership? Volunteerism? Need for service in the community?
- ⇨ Inclusion of community partnerships?

- ⇨ Examples of community, student, and faculty contracts or learning agreements.
- ⇨ Examples of program evaluation
- ⇨ Provide sample information, including information on coursework, administrative, student, and faculty expectations for other colleges using the web-sites as a resource.

In addition to the information gathered from the campus web-sites, it was necessary to contact some community college representatives over the phone for further information. The follow-up phone conversations were done in an effort to gain more information about the programs. Listed below are the questions used in the phone interviews.

- ⇨ When was the program developed and implemented?
- ⇨ Who (title, department) developed the program?
- ⇨ What has been student response to the program (positive, negative, indifferent)?
- ⇨ How is student participation (number)?
- ⇨ What is the population of students enrolled in credit courses?
- ⇨ How is faculty participation (number)?
- ⇨ What is faculty response to program?

Findings & Discussion

Phone interview information provided some sense of history to the service learning programs used in this study. The longest running program was started in 1989, the youngest

programs began in 1993. Campus contacts reported student participation and courses with service learning components are increasing on a term-to-term basis. Students participating in service learning programs accounted for 5% to 17% of the totoal student population. Faculty participation was limited to approximately 1 out of every 14 instructors. Student and faculty populatins vary by campus. The institutions with the largerst studnet populations had the largest proportion of students involved with service learning, whci may be attributed to any number of factors. For example, it is possible that the larger community colleges have more funds and resources available to students, enabling the success of programs like service learning. It is also possible that the more populated institutions have a broader range of community outreach opportunities for their students due to an extended community.

As stated earlier, program success is not necessarily determined by the amount of time a program has been in existence. Using information provided by the 1996 AACC Survey Report, Barnett (1996) writes, "the four most significant factors in the success of service learning were reported to be, in order, faculty support, administrative support, community support, and student commitment. It is of interest that start-up funding was rated seventh in a list of success factors, above technical assistance..."(p.11). Relevant to the Internet presentations of service learning is the point that faculty support is vital to program success. This information correlates with what was mentioned in some of the phone interviews. One campus contact reported that even though service learning has been on the campus since 1989, the program is far from well established. The greatest obstacle reported was faculty resistance and an unwillingness of the faculty to change their curricula. Lack of faculty support can be attributed to a number of contingencies. Some possible reasons may be lack of communication, misunderstanding of expectations, poor

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guidelines or organization of faculty and coursework, and a simple lack of interest on the part of the instructors. Faculty unwillingness, like student unwillingness, is a common theme at the beginning of many service learning courses. Chandler-Gilbert Community College, Miami-Dade Community College and Raritan Valley Community College include benefits to the instructors on their web-sites. Benefits listed on the Miami-Dade web-site are: *Service learning participation enriches and enlivens teaching; changes (instructors') role(s) from the expert on tap, and with that change (they) enjoy a new relationship with (their) students and a new understanding of how learning occurs; as (faculty) connect the community with the curriculum, (they) become more aware of current societal issues as they relate to (their) academic area of interest; (they) identify new areas for research and publication, and thus increase (their) opportunities for professional recognition and reward* (Miami-Dade Community College). The AACC encourages identifying key faculty members as leaders, who can in turn, bring on board the other faculty members who may be reluctant to participate in service learning as well as involving the curriculum committees on campuses when revising and approving courses with service learning components (AACC: Community Colleges & Service Learning, 1996, p.5).

In addition to attracting faculty members to participate in the program, it is important to have the position or placement of a service learning program clearly defined. Ten of the eleven service learning programs are maintained by a branch of the Office/Dean/Vice-President of Instruction. The one community college that did not house the service learning program under Instruction was also the college struggling with development despite the fact that the program has been in existence for almost ten years. This seems to be the most obvious and successful place to house such a program for the reason that issues of curriculum and course credit are decided

within these structures. In addition, service learning offices should work closely with the Office of the President and the Co-Curricular or Student Services Offices in an effort to strengthen the program and insure longevity.

Seven of the schools listed benefits to students who participated in service learning programs (Raritan, Miami-Dade, Chandler-Gilbert, Central Seattle, GateWay, Kirtland, College of the Canyons). College of the Canyons summarized student benefits as the following: service learning provides an interesting option to classroom work and experiences that can help to shape career choices. Service learning also increases student participation in the classroom and interaction with the instructor as they are more willing to share their experiences with classmates and instructors (College of the Canyons, 1999). Chandler-Gilbert's web-site includes student reactions to participating in service learning. One student indicates, "I learned what one person can do to help the community. After doing my service, I feel better about myself," while another student reported "I have opened my eyes and my heart to the social problems in our community" (Chandler-Gilbert, 1999). Although students are reportedly hesitant at the start of their involvement of such programs, their end reactions are clearly positive, with many students indicating they will continue their community service in some capacity. Students' reactions may be used as indicators for their future involvement with service learning and other school-related activities. It can be assumed that the more positive the students' experiences with the community college, the more they encouraged they may be to pursue their educational goals. While there is no definitive research on student involvement and retention, there appears to be an abundance of anecdotal information supporting the positive aspects of service learning.

Not all of the student benefits appear in the form of student reactions. Kirtland Community College and Miami-Dade Community College offer awards, scholarships and stipends for students participating in the programs, while Seattle Central Community College and offers *student development transcripts*. Kirtland devotes web space to "Awards and Recognition" for students. One of the awards, the Kirtland Community College Community Scholar, acknowledges a student who demonstrates model service to the community while maintaining high academic performance. This student receives a certificate and a $150 stipend from the Service Learning Program (Kirtland Community College, 1999). Miami-Dade currently offers two scholarships. Both scholarships, each for $200, are given to three Miami-Dade students who maintain a 3.0 grade point average, participate in service learning, and the extent of their service to the community(Miami-Dade, 1999). The purposes for advertising, or presenting, scholarship and award information serves two major purposes. The first is for promotional purposes among the student population. It is highly likely that students make up the largest population viewing the service learning web-site of their respective campus. The more positive aspects schools can use in an effort to promote their program, the more willing students will be to participate in the service learning courses. The more incentives there are for students to participate in such programs, the more likely they will be to actually participate. If students are celebrated for the work they do in the classroom and community, they will be more encouraged to continue with their work. In addition to scholarships and awards available throughout the year, some community colleges mentioned the addition of a student development transcript, which serves as a supplementary transcript for students as a means of verifying participation in service learning courses. This transcript serves the students on multiple levels. On the one hand, students are able to use this

transcript in addition to their academic transcript when applying to senior institutions and jobs. The student development transcripts may also provide the students with motivation to continue on in their community service and academic pursuits. Staying consistent with Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement, the more the student can make and feel connections to his or her campus, the more likely the student is to persist and meet his or her educational goals. Establishing awards and recognition for students extends the opportunity for students to change their educational perspective.

The second key reason for presenting information on recognition via the Internet is for those schools relying on other campus web-sites for information. A few campuses, specifically Miami-Dade, provide a great deal of useful information for schools currently working on developing their own service learning programs. Miami-Dade not only provides information on special transcript notation and scholarships, there is also "Ten Steps to Develop and Execute a Service Learning Strategy", "Support Services for Service Learning at MDCC", and "Common Faculty Concerns"(Miami-Dade Community College, 1999). Clearly the more comprehensive the information available, the more useful the web-site is for helping other campuses develop their own programs. Based on the fact that many of the community college web-sites include contact names and numbers, background information on their specific programs, and encourage those of us perusing their web-sites to e-mail or call with any questions establishes a strong sense that these campuses are willing to share their programmatic successes in an attempt to help other campuses develop their service learning programs.

In addition to including sample contracts for students, faculty, and community agencies, Western Montana College, Kapi'olani Community College in Hawaii, and Central Seattle

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Community College in Washington provide an important aspect of service learning: evaluation and assessment. As service learning programs develop on many campuses, colleges and organizations are interested in the outcomes of service learning programs. It is necessary to evaluate programs to ensure effectiveness and student and community success. Providing information on outcomes aids other campuses with their development. Including the information, or sample information, on the Internet allows those campuses working on developing service learning to look at what has and has not worked in the past. Including evaluative information contributes to a network of information. Seattle Central Community College provides a registration worksheet for faculty and students. Questions such as, "How might you incorporate the student's service experience into the curriculum?" and "How might the service experience be evaluated?" are all helpful questions that open the door to end-of-the-program evaluations by faculty, students, and the community agencies. Other elements of the course development worksheet include suggestions for future service activities and asking instructors and agencies about the types of experiences that would reinforce course content. (Seattle Central, 1999). Western Montana has a campus assessment worksheet that helped determine the needs of the community as well as summarize the efforts of their service learning program. The evaluation is generic, it can be filled out by students, faculty, administrators, and staff. Some of the sample questions are, "Through the activities listed above, what needs of the community do you see being addressed (educational, environmental, public safety, human, etc.)?", "Are there other needs in the community that you feel are not being met?", "What do you feel you can learn from involvement in the community?" (Western Montana, 1999). A final note about assessing outcomes relates to a key component of service learning, that being the inclusion of student reflection. It is entirely

possible that until students commit their expenses to paper and examine their responses to participation, they may not fully understand or appreciate their involvement. Additionally, faculty and agency response to evaluations may also highlight the benefits of and need for participation in such programs. Taking these possibilities one step further, it is probable that these evaluations will initiate further development or expansion of programs and increase student participation, consequently increasing student involvement.

Another intriguing finding is that of the majority of service learning courses falling under the umbrellas of humanities and the social sciences. This information is not surprising considering there are countless opportunities for community service and reflection in sociology, psychology, and literature and composition classes. Eight of the eleven schools indicated work within HIV/AIDS-related capacities. Service learning projects around such a critical issue helps train students in sensitivity, understanding, and lifestyle decisions, all of which are crucial for life on a college campus. Tutoring and after-school reading programs are also popular service learning projects, as demand for help in local elementary schools and programs seems to be increasing. Raritan Valley Community College is an example of a service learning program that has shifted from traditional, or obvious, community involvement to new areas of service. Consistent with tutoring, Raritan Valley students may be helping adult immigrants by tutoring in math, helping these students prepare for general equivalency degrees. Nutrition classes may involve preparing and delivering food to homeless shelters and soup kitchens. Courses in legal assistance may participate in mediation of minor matters and assist in courtrooms (Raritan Valley Community College). It is not clear if service learning programs are expanding to meet the demands of the students or if they are expanding in an effort to attract more students. The rationale is less

important than the outcome. If students are enrolling in the courses and reporting satisfaction at the conclusion of the courses, then there is evidence of a need for expansion. An important point for consideration and justification for service learning in all disciplines is simply that service opportunities and community needs do not fit neatly into humanities or social sciences. The demands of the community should weigh heavily on the development of service learning curricula.

The web-sites contained themes of *civic responsibility, citizenship, student development, lifelong commitment to service, and changed perceptions of education.* Focusing on these concepts shows that there is a need to address service outside the realm of the simply tutoring and after-school programs. If college campuses are indeed microcosms of the world, then the service learning programs should reflect this. A common thread the aforementioned themes have is that of involvement in some capacity. An assumption stemming from involvement is that students will be required to step outside of their comfort zones, or the safe bubble of campus life, and into new areas of exploration. Exposure to new ideas, environments and challenges will give life to the lifelong commitment to service, civic responsibility, and student development.

Research Implications and Limitations

There is a vast amount of information available which supports the many benefits of service learning programs on community college campuses, however there is little information regarding web-based presentation or promotion of service learning. It is important to point out that the number of community colleges used in this study was small due to the fact that availability of information was limited. As more colleges move towards Internet-based promotion, the availability of information will increase. Funding and technology may also be limitations with

program promotion. Many of the schools contacted mentioned a need for increased funding and technical support. It may be the case that funding and technology may be limited until the programs prove their utility on the campuses. Proving utility may be difficult when there are limited resources and support in the infant stages of such programs. An encouraging aspect of this research is that there is a great sense of willingness among the many program directors to share and disseminate structure and experiences related to service learning in an effort to help those campuses in the early stages of implementation. As mentioned, willingness of faculty and students to participate will impact the success of a service learning program. Formal efforts need to be established and pursued in an effort to avoid un-willingness and lack of participation. Service Learning programs provide sound opportunities for students to become involved on their campuses and in their communities, it can also provide them with a newfound commitment to their education. Service learning is an attractive alternative to the traditional classroom environment. Students are challenged and asked to reflect on their experiences as community members and students and evaluate the effects of their contributions to their respective communities.

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